

PHIL 434: Ethics 2

1:00-2:30 PM Tuesdays and Thursdays
Leacock 927

Instructor

Greg Mikkelson
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Office hour: 1:00-2:30 PM Wednesdays
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Topic for Winter 2009

The real, the good, and the right: Deep green theory and practice

In 1973, Australasian philosopher Richard Sylvan published a paper now seen as a founding document in the field of environmental ethics. However, the type of environmental philosophy that he called for – "deep green theory" (DGT) – never became a central paradigm of this field. This is partly because no one fleshed DGT or its implications out beyond the skeletal form that he imparted.

This course is predicated on the idea that something like DGT may be the best approach to environmental philosophy (and indeed philosophy as a whole, as Sylvan himself intended), and dedicated to the task of fleshing it out a bit more. After digesting Sylvan's outline of DGT, we will consider a specific version of the general kind of meta-ethical position that it requires, namely Oddie's robust moral realism. We will then trace the strand of normative ethics that Oddie deems to be the most promising counterpart to his moral realism – defining the good as richness or organic unity – from Leibniz through to my own (modest?) attempt to contribute. Finally, we will envision the practical consequences of these theoretical views, by analyzing one response to the appalling loss of biodiversity and other important aspects of richness that is currently underway: Kovel's case for ecosocialism.

Requirements

Class participation: 10% of grade

Presentation: 30%

Depending on the number of students, this will either be a group or an individual presentation.

Paper: 60%

3,000 to 4,000 words, double-spaced, and printed double-sided, or one-sided on "scratch" paper already used on the other side

Readings

Additional required readings are available through WebCT.

Oddie, G. 2006. Value, Reality, and Desire. Oxford University. New York, NY. Available on-line through the McGill network at:

www.oxfordscholarship.com/oso/public/content/philosophy/9780199273416/toc.html.

Kovel, J. 2007. The Enemy of Nature. Zed. New York, NY. Available at The Word bookstore, 469 rue Milton.

Schedule

Introduction

Tuesday January 6th: Themes and logistics

Thursday January 8th: Toward impartiality

Reading: Sylvan and Bennett, "An Outline of Deep Green Theory"

Section 1: The real

Tuesday January 13th: Robust moral realism

Reading: Oddie, Chapter 1

Thursday January 15th: Desire as experience of the good

Reading: Oddie, Chapter 2

Tuesday January 20th: The role of reason

Reading: Oddie, Chapters 3 and 4

Thursday January 22nd: Perverse desires

Reading: Oddie, Chapter 5

Tuesday January 27th: The irreducibility of value

Reading: Oddie, Chapter 6

Thursday January 29th: Causation

Reading: Oddie, Chapter 7

Tuesday February 10th: Bridging vs. closing gaps

Rescheduled from January 29th

Reading: Oddie, Chapter 8

Skype interview with the author

Section 2: The good

Tuesday February 3rd: The intrinsic value of biological diversity

Reading: Bradley, "The Value of Endangered Species"

Thursday February 5th: Biodiversity science

Source: www.iucnredlist.org

Thursday February 12th: A philosophical antecedent of richness-based axiology

Reading: Leibniz, "Discourse on Metaphysics"

Tuesday February 17th: The richness of nature

Reading: Miller, "Value as Richness"

Thursday February 19th: Organic unity

Reading: Kelly, Introduction and Sections 1.1, 2.1, and 2.2

Tuesday March 3rd: Organisms, ecosystems, and satisfaction

Reading: Kelly, Sections 2.3-2.6

Thursday March 5th: Variety and equality in ecology, economics, and ethics

Reading: Mikkelson, "Diversity and the Good"

Section 3: The right

Tuesday March 10th: Ecological devastation

Reading: Kovel, Prefaces and Chapters 1 and 2

Thursday March 12th: Capitalism

Reading: Kovel, Chapter 3

Tuesday March 17th: Natural systems

Reading: Kovel, Chapters 4 and 5

Thursday March 19th: Environmentalism

Reading: Kovel, Chapters 6 and 7

Tuesday March 24th: Political experiments

Kovel, Chapter 8

Thursday March 26th: Possible worlds

Kovel, Chapter 9 and Afterword

Presentations

Tuesday March 31st-Thursday April 9th